

The aim of this thesis is to explore the phenomenon of the Harlem Renaissance as not only an artistic but also a socio-political movement in American history. I shall try to trace its historical conditions, its ideology and accomplishments.

Introducing its main intellectual leaders--scholars as well as men of belles-lettres, I will take an insight into the ambience of cultural events and discussions that they created and comment on the diversity of attitudes toward the role of the African American in American society that they launched. Among the most prominent and influential intellectuals who fathered the Movement were Alain LeRoy Locke, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson and Charles S. Johnson.

The second target of this thesis is to examine one of the outstanding literary voices of this period. Out of the many artists who began their career during the Harlem Renaissance and one should name at least Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer--I chose the personality of Zora Neale Hurston as a representative of the unconventional black female artist of this time.

In my focus were Hurston's artistic aims to ground the Black identity as opposed, and sometimes even parallel, to some of her contemporaries. Hurston's former friend, later a rival, Langston Hughes would probably be her best-balanced counterpart. What connected Hurston with Hughes was their common endeavor to make the black vernacular speech a form of art.

An essential part of the thesis will deal with Hurston's view of the race issue as she developed it under the influence of the anthropologist Franz Boas. I will explain Boas's cultural relativism and its implications for Hurston's work.